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TIPPLE POWER!

Welcome once again to Bar Fly: The *Guardian* Guide to Local Drinking. We haven't even started yet, and already I need a cocktail. Oh look, there's one right here. Nice! That's the first step to a great night out: finding a delicious libation near at hand. The second step? Knowing where to jet if the pour at your first stop is weak. With that in mind, we decided to map some of our favorite local bars, beer spots, meet markets, and munchie havens in one handy guide, suitable for slipping into your barhopping back pocket. Bottoms up — and don't forget your adorable designated driver or friendly, available cabbie!

Marke B., Bar Fly editor
marke@sfbg.com

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CLASSIC BARS P4
AWESOME COCKTAILS P8
MEET MARKETS P12
BEER SPOTS P16
GAME BARS P20
BAR BITES P24

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ZEITGEIST

GUARDIAN PHOTO BY BRANDON JOSEPH BAKER

CLASSIC BARS

Your friends are flying in to visit you for the first time, or your cousins are coming to stay for a week. Where can you send them to get a real (alcoholic) taste of San Francisco? Here are some longtime favorites that will whet their whistles for the city experience.

SPEC'S TWELVE ADLER MUSEUM CAFÉ

When your book club finishes *Moby Dick*, this is the place to discuss it. With funky maritime detritus adorning the walls, ample shared tables, and crackers and cheese cut from a giant wheel for sale, Spec's is the perfect North Beach bar to pull up to for five-hour stretches of heady discussion.

12 William Saroyan Place, SF. (415) 421-4112

BIG FOUR RESTAURANT

Named for the four notorious railroad tycoons of the late 1800s, filled with historic photos and memorabilia, and appointed with forest green leather chairs and a live pianist, this bar and lounge in the Huntington is the perfect place to drink an Old Fashioned surrounded by old money in old world opulence. Recession be damned!

1075 California, SF. (415) 771-1140
www.huntingtonhotel.com

THE MINT KARAOKE LOUNGE

At this karaoke bar, the songs are performed pitch-perfectly and all too seriously by some regulars — and as comedy routines by others. This mixed bag of talent and lack thereof makes for a riotous evening out at the Mint, even if you never have the courage (or enough cocktails) to sing a note. Plus, you can order sushi from the joint next door.

1942 Market, SF. (415) 626-4726, www.themint.net

EAGLE TAVERN

The Eagle's a gay leather biker bar in theory and sometimes in practice, but between the super cheap Thursday night live rock shows, the all-you-can-drink (for charity!) Sunday afternoon beer busts, and one of the best outdoor fire pit–equipped patios available, everybody flies into the Eagle eventually.

398 12th St., SF. (415) 626-0880, www.sfeagle.com

TONGA ROOM

This grand Polynesian escapist wonderland in the Fairmont Hotel has a lake in the middle of the restaurant with a floating band and a regular rainstorm descending from the ceiling. The tiki drinks and food are less thrilling than the magnificent ambience, so go during the happy hour buffet (weekdays, 5–7 p.m.) and make the most of it.

950 Mason, SF. (415) 772-5278, www.tongaroom.com

HARRY DENTON'S STARLIGHT ROOM

Whether during the its DJ nights, drag brunches, or any time in between, there's nothing like a top-shelf martini at this top-floor Sir Francis Drake Hotel bar, with a magnificent view of the

CONTINUES ON PAGE 6 ››

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SPEC'S TWELVE ADLER MUSEUM CAFÉ

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CLASSIC BARS

continued...

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450 Powell, SF. (415) 395-8595
www.harrydenton.com

LITTLE SHAMROCK

The Shamrock's well-worn interior and odd 19th-century memorabilia advertises its history as one of the city's oldest taprooms. And reasonable prices, comfortable seating, and lots of happy regulars makes it a perpetual favorite — even beyond St. Patrick's Day.
807 Lincoln Way, SF. (415) 661-0060

VESUVIO

This former Beat poet hangout next to City Lights Bookstore may be slightly worn from the 60 years it's been open — but that only adds to the only-in-San Francisco charm. Vesuvio's a two-story, wood-detailed, art- and knickknack-packed bar in which you should bring a book, have a beer, and blow off your workday.
255 Columbus Ave., SF (415) 362-3370
www.vesuvio.com

ZEITGEIST

The premier spot for finding your hipster honey in the Mission. Zeitgeist's massive patio is legendary, filled with long picnic tables that on a packed sunny day facilitate nicely random thigh rubbing with strangers by the hanging bike racks. Just grab a pitcher from the stellar draft lineup, and nab a spot underneath the pink elephant mural.
199 Valencia, SF., (415) 255-7505
www.zeitgeist199.com

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POP'S

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AWESOME COCKTAILS

"You don't know how to drink," says ad exec Roger Sterling on retro television masterpiece *Mad Men*. "Your whole generation, you drink for the wrong reasons." We respectfully disagree. Here are a few examples of cutting-edge mixology and delectable drinks we just can't get enough of.

MARMALADE WHISKEY SOUR AT BOURBON AND BRANCH

Skeptical about the fearsome power of the cocktail? You will never be again after a table of drinks at Bourbon and Branch, a speakeasy whose serving staff will recite martini specials as though they were the finest verse. The sweet-tart marmalade whiskey sour, made with citrus, egg white, and orange marmalade, perfectly encapsulates the labor intensive, supremely stylish options available.

501 Jones, SF., (415) 931-7292, www.bourbonandbranch.com

VIN DE PAMPLEMOUSSE AT RANGE

Climb onto a barstool at this small parkside restaurant and be prepared to be wowed. The unorthodox pairings of the cocktail list may seem discomfiting, but drinks like the vin de pamplemousse — vodka and sauvignon blanc masterfully pumped up with grapefruit, vanilla, and lemon — will convince you that unorthodox can equal delicious.

842 Valencia, SF., (415) 282-8283, www.rangesf.com

RAMOS GIN FIZZ AT RICKHOUSE

This is a fairly standard classic brunch drink. But Rickhouse, brought to us by the same brilliant minds behind Bourbon and Branch, makes history taste good. Its Ramos gin fizz, when sipped against the bar's salvaged wine barrel slatted walls, is the perfect "Good morning!" on a drink menu so comprehensive and detailed it borders on the encyclopedic.

246 Kearney, SF., (415) 398-2827, www.rickhousebar.com

BACON MANHATTAN AT POP'S

You haven't lived until you've experienced a martini glass rimmed with chopped bacon. At least, that's what you'll be feeling after Monday night at Mission dive Pop's, where occasional dishes of free fried pig are complemented by the house special, a classic Maker's Manhattan with a bacon swizzle and the aforementioned meat-edged magic.

2800 24th, SF., (415) 401-7677, www.myspace.com/popsbar

PROMISSORY NOTE AT THE ALEMBIC

The interior of this Upper Haight bar may give the uneasy impression that you're drinking in a mad genius sea captain's laboratory. But the drink menu is a perfectly comforting blend of classics and new-school provenance. For an alchemistic taste of the latter, try the Promissory Note, a stimulus package of reposado tequila, ginger liqueur, and absinthe with a touch of honey to sweeten the deal.

1725 Haight, SF., (415) 666-0822, www.alembicbar.com

CONTINUES ON PAGE 10 ››



Hotel Utah Saloon

★food ★drinks
★music ★fun

500 4th @ Bryant · SF · hotelutah.com



ALEMBIC

GUARDIAN PHOTO BY BRANDON JOSEPH BAKER

AWESOME COCKTAILS

continued...

BUCCANEER AT CANTINA

You would expect an establishment that grows its own citrus trees to make good on juicy cocktails. And Cantina, tucked in a luxe neighborhood above Union Square, does not disappoint. The buccaneer is a neo-tiki-bar treat, minus the headache-inducing sweetness. It's a blend of gin, crushed pineapple, Campari, and Velvet Falernum liqueur that leaves your tongue with a hint of that homegrown lemon tart.

580 Sutter, SF., (415) 398-0195, www.cantinasf.com

SAO PAOLO SIN AT RYE

In a perfect world, everyone would drink a Sao Paolo sin before bed and be soothed into exotic dreamscapes. Sagatiba cachaça infused with Thai chile, cocoa nibs, Cherry Heering liqueur, and Allspice Dram — the mix isn't overly weighty, just sweet and rich with a tickle of heat on the end, sure to invoke Rye's arty pool-hall suavity in your deepest slumbers.

688 Geary, SF., (415) 786-7803, www.ryesf.com

VALENCIA AT ANDALU

Perhaps you came to Andalu for its superior contemporary tapas: bites of sea bass in lettuce cups, rich fondue, a "banana lumpia split" with dulce de leche ice cream. But while you were there, you discovered the cocktail menu. You'll never miss it again once you've tried the Valencia, a perfect balance of ginger vodka, spicy basil, and honey syrup. Would "*ole*!" be the appropriate response here?

3198 16th St., SF., (415) 621-2211, www.andalusf.com

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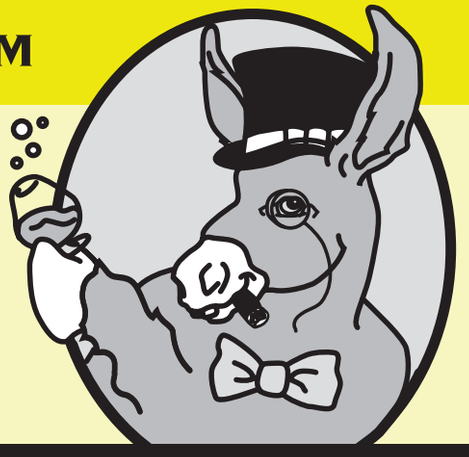
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LEXINGTON CLUB

GUARDIAN PHOTO BY ERIK ANDERSON

MEET MARKETS

Because it's not enough that we live in one of the most beautiful, creative cities in the world. It's not enough that we're chasing our dreams, being good friends, eating local, and staying in shape. We need to hook up as well. Assembled below are the least offensive spots to sound your mating call.

THE AMBASSADOR

This is a good-looking bar. Deep leather booths, intriguing configuration of chandeliers — you'd be excused for thinking that this is a place for ice queens and look-don't-touch social cues. But the Ambassador crowd mixes and mingles and gets down. Rotary phones installed in the aforementioned booths encourage table neighbors to call each other for a chat, and the dance floor gets crankin' on the regular.

673 Geary, SF, (415) 563-8192
www.ambassador415.com

LEXINGTON CLUB

San Francisco is no Oakland. That dyke-y paradise has the city (not so) straight beat when it comes to lesbian bars. But the lamentable dearth can almost be overlooked at the Lexington Club, a scruffy corner dive that's a fun, cramped stomping ground for ladies who munch. There, you'll find rock-bottom drink

prices, hot lone rangers, and couples looking for their third amiga.
3464 19th St., SF., (415) 863-2052
www.thelexingtonclub.com

TRUCK

Get your engine revved at this automotive-themed gay bar, where the 20- and 30- something crowd gets their hands greasy. Truck has a burger menu that can be almost as distracting as the raunchy shenanigans of its young dudes. Sports nights are perfect opportunities to find your manly man. Put a downpayment on that hot rod by suggesting that you rendezvous for the Saturday $5 bottomless shot special.
1900 Folsom, SF., (415) 252-0306, www.trucksf.com

SWIG

Fireplaces have got to be the most panty-dropping heat sources out there. So when the air gets chilly in the city, head to Swig and warm up to a sweetie. The Union Square bar has a sleek, high-design interior perfect for spreading warmth — advantageous spots near the large, open hearth, sultry movements on the dance floor, and the bar's 150-plus arsenal of whiskies.
561 Geary, SF., (415) 931-7292, www.swigbar.com

BEAUTY BAR

What do you look for in a mate? Sense of humor, open heart, good with children and puppies ... Oh, don't lie — you find the hottest person in the bar and attack. And at Beauty Bar, everyone's keeping up on appearances. Ass-shaking music on a tiny dance floor necessitates getting up close and personal. There's even a table set up for manicures in the front. Polish those exteriors, guapos.
2299 Mission, SF., (415) 285-0323
www.beautybar.com/sf

BLUE LIGHT CAFÉ

Let's face it, it can be hard to be a "normal" in our area. Where's a girl to go for button-downed, gainfully employed good old boys? Helpfully for those so inclined, this Cow Hollow spot attracts a healthy cocktail of tourists and Marina party people who are down to share Jager bombs with a new friend. And you ain't gotta know the difference between a fixie and single-speed to kick it.
1979 Union, SF., (415) 922-5510, bluelightbarsf.com

BADLANDS

Scoff if you want, but if you're looking for sweaty man love and heavy doses of cologne and Lady Gaga, you can find it here. Strobe lights, cruise-y side rooms, Top 40 videos: where the singles at? They're right here, because this Castro spot keeps its covers low and expectations likewise. After all, it's hard to be picky when you just spilled watermelon cosmo on your Affliction tee.
4121 18th St., SF., (415) 626-9320
www.badlands-sf.com

GO TO GUIDE

1. **Alembic**, p9
2. **Ambassador**, p12
3. **Amnesia**, p16
4. **Andalu**, p10
5. **Badlands**, p13
6. **Bar None**, p21
7. **Beauty Bar**, p13
8. **Bender's**, p24
9. **Big Four**, p4
10. **Blue Light Cafe**, p13
11. **Bourbon and Branch**, p8
12. **Broken Record**, p26
13. **Buckshot**, p20
14. **Café Prauge**, p16
15. **Cantina**, p10
16. **City Beer Store and Tasting Bar**, p16
17. **Eagle**, p5
18. **Eagle's Drift-In**, p22
19. **Edinburgh Castle**, p22
20. **The Fishbowl Bar and Grill**, p21
21. **Fly Bar**, p25
22. **Harry Denton's**, p5
23. **Healthy Spirits**, p17
24. **Jack's Cannery**, p17
25. **Kennedy's**, p25
26. **Lexington Club**, p12
27. **Little Shamrock**, p6
28. **Madrone Art Bar**, p20
29. **Mint**, p5
30. **Palace Pigalle**, p18
31. **Playground**, p24
32. **Pop's**, p9
33. **Range**, p8
34. **Rickhouse**, p9
35. **Riptide**, p22
36. **Rye**, p10
37. **Specs**, p4
38. **Swig**, p13
39. **330 Ritch**, p24
40. **Tee Off**, p21
41. **Tommy's Joynt**, p18
42. **Tonga Room**, p5
43. **Triple Rock Brewery and Alehouse**, p18
44. **Truck**, p13
45. **Underdogs**, p25
46. **Vesuvio**, p6
47. **Waziema**, p26
48. **Zeitgeist**, p6





CAFE PRAGUE

GUARDIAN PHOTO BY RORY MCNAMARA

BEER SPOTS

Zeitgeist. Toronado. Lucky 13. La Trappe. Monk's Kettle. It seems you can't swing a Racer 5-lover in this town without hitting a "better beer" bar. Below are some of our lesser-known favorites.

AMNESIA

This tiny spot has a better beer selection (and more charm) per square foot than any other watering hole in the Mission. Sure, you can get hipster staples like PBR ($3 in a bottle) or Stella ($4 on tap), but you'd be wiser to let mustachioed manager Matthew Harman recommend suds from his ever-changing selection of local craft brews and favorites from afar. (This winter's Punkin Ale from Delaware brewery Dogfish Head was especially good).

853 Valencia, SF. (415) 970-0012
www.amnesiathebar.com

CAFÉ PRAGUE

Belgian beers may be all the imported rage these days, but we still have a soft spot for the Eastern bloc. Unlike the Czech Republic suds in the 1990s, these beers aren't cheaper than water, but they are served in mugs so big that ounce-for-ounce, the price points might be close. Plus you get to drain them alongside hearty Czech fare — try anything made with bacon — in a lovely beer garden.

2140 Mission, SF. (415) 627-7464

CITY BEER STORE AND TASTING BAR

If you can't find the beer you want here, it might not exist. Part retailer and part bar, this SoMa spot's selection of local, domestic, and imported brews that line the wall of coolers and shelves is bar none. You can

either drink your purchase on site, taste one of the rotating beers on tap, or take a mix-and-match six-pack home with you, at 10 percent off.

1168 Folsom, SF. (415) 503-1033
www.citybeerstore.com

HEALTHY SPIRITS

This Duboce Triangle corner store looks deceptively like a neighborhood market, but craft brew resource Ratebeer considers it the 27th best beer store in the world. The staff doesn't just sell beer — they are in love with beer. In fact, their devotion, knowledge, and penchant for food pairing is far closer to food-ie than frat boy. Unfortunately, you can't drink your suds on site, but Duboce Park is only a few blocks away.

2299 15th St, SF. (415) 255-0610
healthy-spirits.blogspot.com

JACK'S CANNERY

Thanks to its fireplace and mounted animal heads, this Fisherman's Wharf watering hole has the look and feel of an English pub. Yet the beer selection goes far beyond the Boddington's, Newcastle, and Guinness you'd expect. Indeed, Jack's carries more than 80 beers at any given time, with nearly 40 on tap. The drinks aren't cheap — this is still the tourist district, after all — but the oysters ($1 each since Jan. 1 and until further notice) are.

2801 Leavenworth, SF. (415) 931-6400
www.jackscannerybar.com

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TRIPLE ROCK

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BEER SPOTS

continued...

PLACE PIGALLE

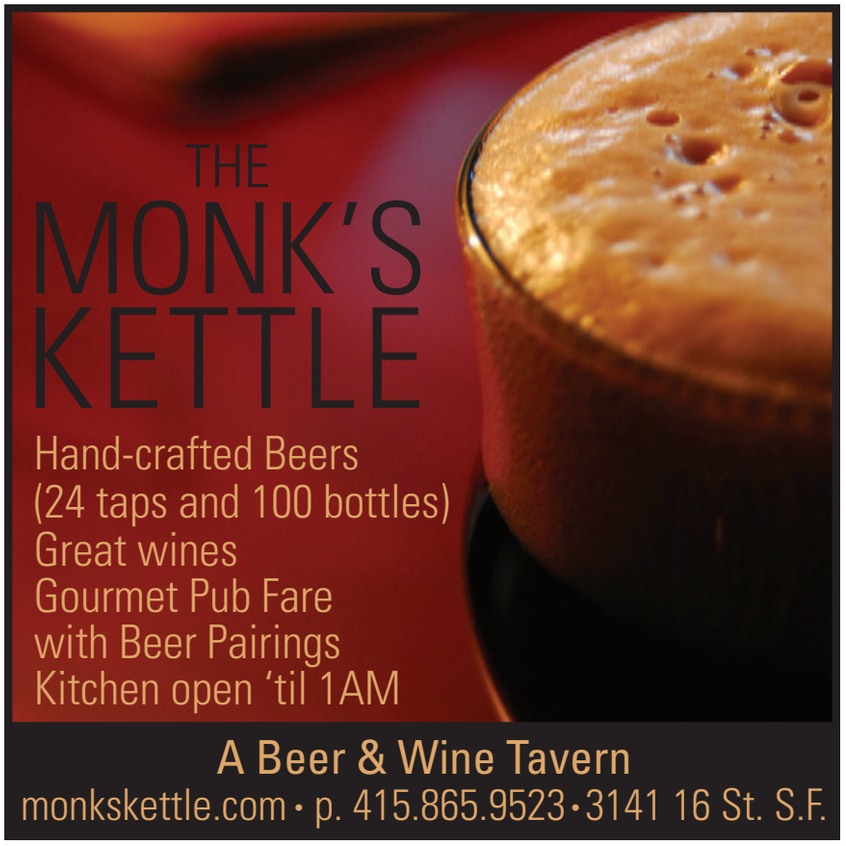
Locals refer to this Hayes Valley destination as a dive. But the décor is too stylish, the couches too comfy, and the beer menu too eclectic for it to really qualify. It's actually a refreshingly laid back and lowbrow alternative to the expensive restaurants and fussy cocktails otherwise available in San Francisco's favorite new shopping district.
520 Hayes, SF. (415) 552-2671

TOMMY'S JOYNT

A San Francisco institution that could probably survive on the reputation of its hearty, meaty, comfort food alone. Instead, it pairs its casual Euro-cafeteria vibe with a beer menu that rivals any of the city's more famous beer destinations, including dozens of imports organized by country (Beer from Guatemala? Who knew?).
1101 Geary, SF. (415) 775-4216, www.tommysjoynt.com

TRIPLE ROCK BREWERY AND ALEHOUSE

With a mini-brewery set up on site (and visible from the bar) and a culture that supports collaboration and experimentation, this Berkeley brewpub might be the best place in the Bay Area for a beer lover to work — and it shows. Sours, stouts, triple IPAs: the taps are full of continuously changing small-batch brews that are as interesting as they are tasty. Just beware if you stop by on a Thursday, when Cal undergrads flood the place to drain Triple Rock's once-a-week supply of cult favorite Monkey Head.
1920 Shattuck, Berk. (510) 843-2739
www.triplerock.com



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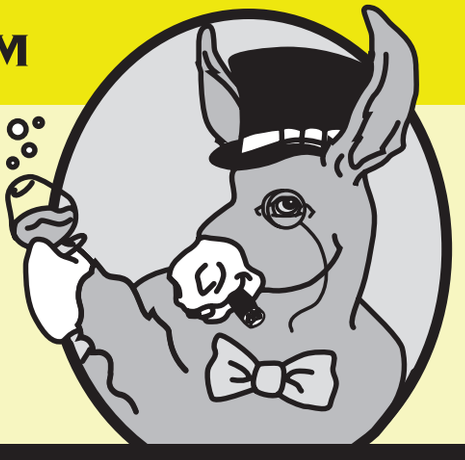


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BAR NONE

GUARDIAN PHOTO BY ERIK ANDERSON

GAME BARS

Is the urge to foos during cosmos a reversion to a simpler, more innocent time? Does social anxiety make us choose Ms. Pac-Man over Ms. Right now? Are trivia nights the revenge of the nerds? Whatever. Grab a drink and get your game on.

BUCKSHOT

Easy money says you're going to have to step up your Skee-Ball game to hang with the crowd at Buckshot, a Richmond establishment typically cited as the top place to go for bar games in the city. In addition to arcade games, darts and pool table, the spot has a biweekly Skee league — with team names like the Skee Amigos and Notorious Skee I.G., natch.

3848 Geary, SF. (415) 831-8838
www.buckshot-sf.com

MADRONE ART BAR

Unfortunately, the board games aren't in effect as much as they used to be at this NoPa staple, but this bar and gallery space still has a chest of them for those of us who are feeling a Boggle binge coming on at.

Monday night (previously geared toward gamers) is now devoted to Motown music, which is still a nice complement to Monopoly.
500 Divisadero, SF., (415) 241-0202
www.madroneartbar.com

BAR NONE

Top 40, dartboards and a pool table — that's the scene that greets you at this Marina favorite. But stick around and you'll catch Bar None's extracurricular activities: a nightly, bar-wide power hour from 9-10 p.m. and certain games you thought you'd never see after your coed years.
1980 Union, SF. (415) 409-4469
www.barnonesf.com

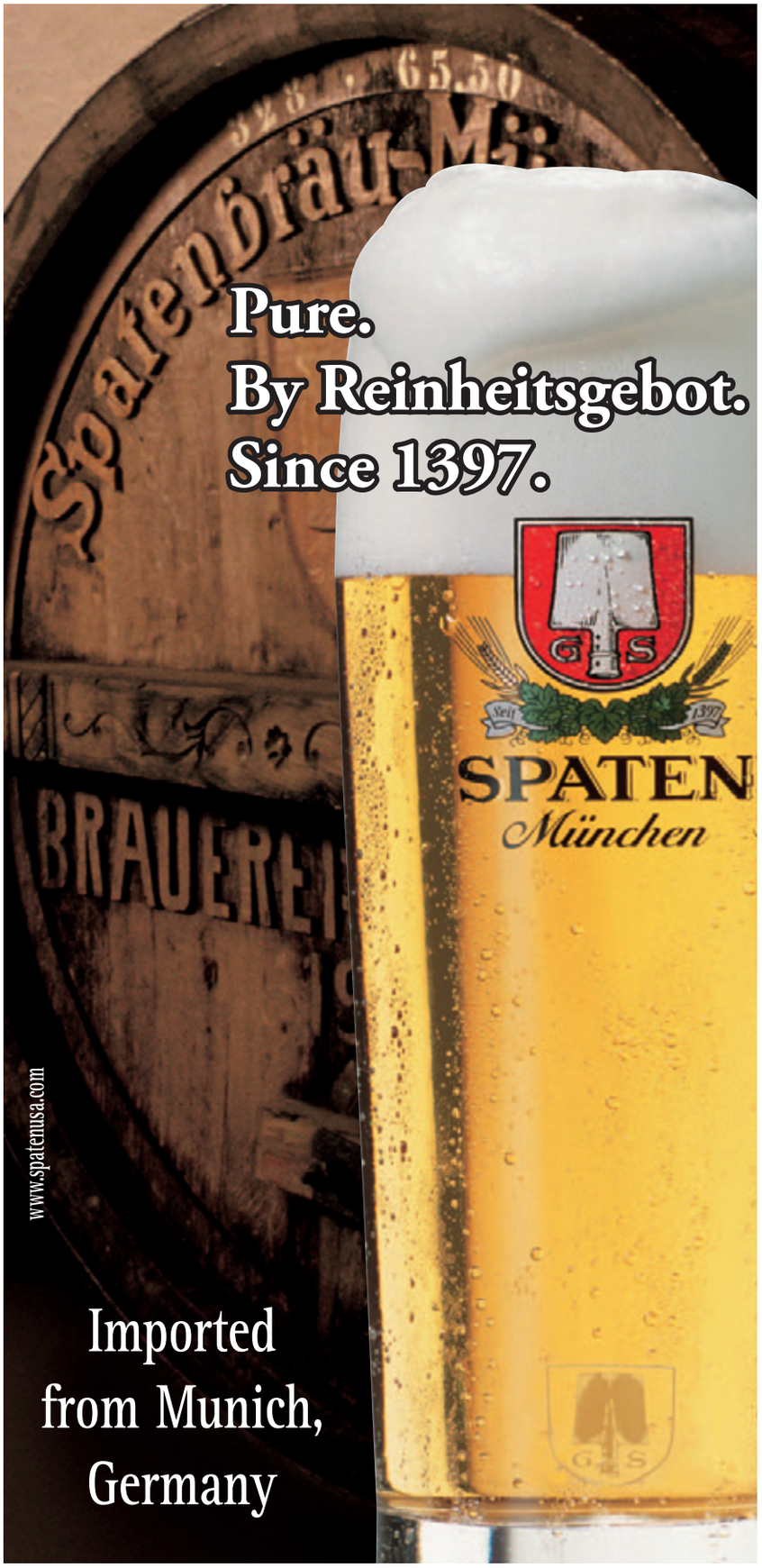
THE FISHBOWL BAR & GRILL

Don't shoot the doe! You'll learn fast at this Lower Pac Heights spot, where the Buck Hunter game is rarely lonely. But urban marksmanship is at its peak during the neighborhood spot's BH tournies, when the floor gets packed herd-tight and the Tecate flows likes a mountain stream.
1854 Divisadero, SF., (415) 775-3630

TEE OFF

Shuffleboard. Does it encapsulate life or what? Start gently, plan your trajectory, and know that anything can happen on the way down the table. Oh, and sometimes you have to knock someone off to get ahead. Richmond pub Tee Off provides the perfect venue to ponder these harsh truths, with a menu full of

CONTINUES ON PAGE 22 ››





BUCKSHOT

GUARDIAN PHOTO BY ERIK ANDERSON

GAME BARS

continued...

serviceable grub, shuffle galore, billiards and pong (the analog kind).
3129 Clement, SF., (415) 752-5239
www.teeoffbarandgrill.com

RIPTIDE

Riptide is where the surfers go to play, and with free food on Fridays, surf movies and a happenin' fireplace for those chilly Sunset evenings, you'll quickly hip to their reasoning. Check out bingo night, 5:30-7:30 p.m. Saturdays for a geriatric good time — no geriatrics necessary.
3639 Taravel, SF., (415) 681-8433, www.riptidesf.com

EAGLE'S DRIFT-IN

For those nights when you have had it up to here with loud downtown bars, head out to Eagle's and throw stuff at the walls. It's the premier darts bar in the city, and if you're lucky you'll see some professionals hitting the bulls-eye at this cozy Outer Sunset dive. Just stay out of range.
1232 Noriega, SF., (415) 661-0166

EDINBURGH CASTLE

The least you can do for your poor cerebellum is fire some synapses while destroying brain cells. And there's no better place to do just that than this precious pub in the 'Loin, where free trivia night and piping hot fish and chips promise to stimulate more parts of your body than that overworked liver of yours.
950 Geary, SF., (415) 885-4074, www.castlenews.com

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UNDERDOGS

GUARDIAN PHOTO BY ERIK ANDERSON

BARS WITH BITES

Trying to satisfy your appetite in a bar can be a quest fraught with mystery and suspense, but you don't have to be a private dick to sleuth out some winners in this town. Just check out this list of top bar snacks we've put the finger on to get you started on the case.

330 RITCH

A well-kept SoMa secret: soul food-oriented lunchtime takeout counter Little Skillet is open for late night munchies at nightclub 330 Ritch. Jackpot! Enjoy Skillet faves like chicken and waffles, chile molasses wings, or a red velvet cupcake, often at cheaper prices than actual lunch at this darling of the dot-com set.

330 Ritch, SF., (415) 902-3125, www.330ritch.com

PLAYGROUND

Sometimes one must sing, ill-advisedly, in a room with bright lights, Korean food, and overpriced bottles of hooch. Enter Playground, a bar-and-BBQ warren of private karaoke rooms perched above Japantown's serene Peace Plaza. Snag a plate of soondae (Korean pork sausage stuffed with sweet rice and vermicelli noodles, $14.95) from the extensive menu of noodles, veggie dishes, and tempura and then scan the mainly Asian song catalog for Cole Porter. Good luck.

1705 Buchanan, SF, (415) 929-1471

BENDER'S

Once at Bender's, a deafening exhaust pipe out-

CONTINUES ON PAGE 25 ››

side heralded the entrance of a chap someone whispered was a Hells Angels hit man. It was almost enough to put one off one's feed at this superlative Mission dive. But not quite. Pair a whiskey burger — ground beef mixed with well booze and served with a side of tots ($8) — with a shot of Maker's, and daisy hipsters will rubberneck you.
806 South Van Ness, SF., (415) 824-1800
www.bendersbar.com

UNDERDOGS

We're not sure why Nick of Nick's Crispy Tacos decided to bless Underdogs, one of the friendliest neighborhood sports spots in the city, with his yummy white-boy Mexican food. But as long as we can binge on hefty handfuls of crispy tortilla with all the fixins ($3.25–$5.25), we don't much care. Swing by on Tuesdays for $1 street tacos, mini-munches that almost justify all the gringos in Baja.
1824 Irving, SF., (415) 566-8700
www.underdogssf.com

KENNEDY'S IRISH PUB & CURRY HOUSE

San Francisco is not the only place in the world where you find a fully decorated Indian restaurant in an Irish pub, but our city has a certain élan that makes this convergence seem plausible — probable, even. You'll feel the magic after getting a load of Kennedy's, where you can get a Guinness with your shrimp utthappam ($12.95), until 1 a.m.
1040 Columbus, SF., (415) 441-8855
www.kennedyscurry.com

FLY BAR

You would never guess that this chain of sleek

CONTINUES ON PAGE 26 »





BENDERS

GUARDIAN PHOTO BY ERIK ANDERSON

BARS WITH BITES

continued...

neighborhood bars would serve a culinary gem more frequently enjoyed in East Coast pizzerias. But Fly Bar, for all its stunning, shiny artwork and stunning, shiny San Franciscans serves pizzetas — salad-topped pizzas whose tasty multitasking will make your indecisive heart sing. Come in at happy hour (3:30-6:30 p.m. every day) for half off all pies.

Various locations, www.flybarandrestaurant.com

BROKEN RECORD

Like a busty blonde with a mean right hook, you will be rewarded for putting your faith in this Outer Mission dive. Just make your way past the front bar to the surprisingly neat dining room for heart-stoppingly good fare that goes well with one beer or 10. House specialties include bacon on everything, including fries ($3/$6) and burgers ($9), and french toast with foie gras butter and blackberries.

1166 Geneva, SF., (415) 963-1713
www.thebrokenrecordsf.com

WAZIEMA

"Are you a real vegetarian?" inquires the Web site of Club Waziema, an elaborately wallpapered nightspot in NoPa. Guess what? "So are millions of Coptic Christian Ethiopians"! Feel at one with them at this boozy place on Divisadero, and eat injera bread and dero wat. Are you not a real vegetarian? No worries, there are plenty of meaty options for you, including Waziema's signature all-you-can-eat platters ($9–$12.50).

543 Divisadero, SF., (415) 346-6641
www.clubwaziema.com

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